

Carol Sargent  
Childcare Learning Centers, Inc. – Stamford, CT  
Before the Human Service Committee

**SUPPORT**

**S.B. No. 1044 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOUPMENT OF STATE COSTS ATTRIBUTABLE TO LOW WAGE EMPLOYERS.**

March 12, 2015

Good afternoon Senator Marilyn Moore, Representative Catherine Abercombie, and members of the Committee.

My name is Carol Sargent and I am the School Readiness Director at the Childcare Learning Centers, Inc. (CLC), located in Stamford, CT. We are the third largest PreK program in the State, we have a teaching staff of 165 and they are members of UAW Local 376. I have worked at CLC which is a State Funded program for thirty three years. Against my father's wishes because he was burdened with my college debt, I began my work as a Head Teacher with a Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood, receiving a modest salary of \$6,500.00.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of SB1044 AAC the Recoupment of State Costs Attributable to Low Wage Employers.

As you know, this bill would require large employers paying less than \$15 per hour to pay a fee to the state. The funds generated from this fee will be appropriated to the Department of Social Services and Development Services and the Office of Early Childhood (OEC).

It is imperative that the funds appropriated to the OEC be used to improve early childhood education in the state with an emphasis on raising the wages of early childhood teachers. As you will hear from my testimony, these teachers are highly committed, incredibly dedicated to our children and grossly underpaid.

It is the wages of these teachers and assistant teachers that I want to tell you about today. This issue is very important to me and should be to you since we are all entrusting these teachers with our most precious possessions - our young children and they do it full day full year who need to work.

Although, we have made limited strides in increasing salaries, we are still paying our teachers very low wages.

- The Assistant Teacher salaries start at \$23,556.00 or \$12.08 per hour, a mere 27% above minimum wage.
- The Teacher position with an Associate's Degree that includes 30 credits in early childhood is currently starting at \$28,860.00 or \$14.80 per hour.
- Our starting salary for a Teacher with a Bachelor's degree is now making \$33,306.00 or \$17.08 per hour.
- We have tried very hard to increase salaries for Teachers with a Bachelor's Degree in order to recruit and retain them to meet the requirements of the State Funded Programs. However, these salaries are still not comparable to salaries offered to Public School teachers.
- All of these positions are 52 weeks per year and average 37.5 hours per week. The Assistant Teacher salary referenced above is equivalent to 26%-29% of the State Median Income. If this staff member was a single mother with three children she would be at 100% Poverty Level based on the 2014-15 Head Start Income Guidelines.
- These salaries can hardly compare with the Stamford Public School systems that are starting salaries at \$48,695.00 for a ten month period (\$57,000.00 if 12 months, which is 71% greater than a starting salary at CLC) for staff member with a Bachelor's degree. As well, the public school benefits and pension are far superior.

At the same time, we are confronting increased mandated requirements which we have been working very hard to satisfy by having 50% of our staff with an Associate's degree (AA) and 50% with a Bachelor's degree (BA) by July 2015. In addition, going forward we must retain the staff with BAs and be prepared to pay them higher wages. We will also need to budget for higher salaries for the 50% of the staff that are currently holding an AA degree that will need the BA degree by 2020.

I appreciate your attention to this issue and urge you to vote yes on SB1044 which will raise additional state revenue to be allocated to the Office of Early Childhood and we believe used largely to increase early childhood teacher wages.

Thank You!